

HARRY PORTER DEUEL THE PIONEER PASSENGER AGENT

Story of the Man Who Sold the First Railroad Ticket Out of Omaha and Who Has Since Set Myriads of Men and Women Happily Along the Road Properly Equipped With Transportation

ALMOST half a century of fighting the battles of Omaha as one of its leading business men is the record of Harry Porter Deuel. Thirty-five of these years were spent as passenger and ticket agent for railroads running into Omaha. He is the dean of Omaha ticket agents, and up to the time of his retirement from active railroad affairs he held the record in Nebraska for continuous service.

A man with a "head for figures" has calculated the amount of traveling that could be done if one man had purchased and used all the tickets sold by Harry Porter Deuel out of Omaha in his thirty-five years' service. Such a man would need, not only a globe trotter, but a solar system trotter. To use up the immense amount of transportation sold him he would have to make two trips to the sun annually, the round trip being 190,000,000 miles. Upon his return each year he would have to take a few runs around the globe to use up the odd ends of his transportation, with, perhaps, an occasional trip to the moon, only 240,000 miles distant. But the mere matter of mileage is not an important one in estimating the good work Harry Deuel has done for Omaha and for its up-building. He has been always an aggressive factor in the growth of the city. He was here to lay the foundations and he was on the spot when much of the superstructure of the city was erected. He is still here, six feet of genial manhood upon whom more than seventy winters of time have left a gentle trace.

Started from New York

His father was an old-fashioned New York cooper, the backwoods kind that you read about, and Harry was born in Clarkson, Monroe county, New York, December 11, 1826. When he was little more than a year old his father abandoned his trade of cooper and moving to what was then the far west, Farmington, Fulton county, Illinois, he engaged in farming. Harry, growing up, was sent to the little log school house, where he learned rapidly and soon exhibited capabilities and ambitions beyond those of most of his companions. At the age of 17 he entered Lombard university at Galesburg, where he pursued his studies until the death of his mother. He was then about to graduate, but left the university and went back to be with his father on the farm. He remained there until November, 1859, when the "call of the west" came to him and he decided to respond. Packing his few belongings, he took a river boat at Peoria for Omaha. He went by way of St. Louis and St. Joseph, arriving at the latter point when the river to the north was frozen and closed to navigation. But this was no obstacle to stop a pioneer with health and two good legs and he walked a hundred miles over the uninhabited, dreary prairies to the home of an uncle in the vicinity of what is now Falls City. After a short visit there he left and walked to Omaha.

The great empire of the west was opening up rapidly. Thousands of emigrants had passed through Omaha in the ten years preceding. These pioneers needed many supplies and provisions from the east. Omaha was the funnel through which these supplies were poured from the east into the west. Mr. Deuel at once went into business with his uncle, John R. Porter, in conducting a steamboat agency. They were agents for the Hannibal & St. Joseph packet line, which operated a line of boats with Omaha as northern terminal. Among these were the "West Wind," "Colorado," "Spread Eagle," "Denver" and "Hesperian." The round trip from St. Joseph to Omaha on these boats took five days and it was the aim of the company to make a daily service.

Business Was General

The first place of business of Porter & Deuel was established near the famous "Lone Tree" resort, which was then a boat landing and general rendezvous for travelers. Later a large warehouse was built at the foot of Farnam street. Through that warehouse went thousands of tons of the figurative "brick and mortar" for the building of the great empire structure in the western half of this continent. Immense rolls of wire, great casks of insulators and big boxes of other supplies were unloaded from the steamers daily and reloaded upon ox teams for the west. These were for the building of the Western Union telegraph line which James Creighton was then pushing at the rate of several miles a day toward the Pacific coast. Building materials, wagons, harness, farming implements, groceries, dry goods, in fact everything needed by the pioneers passed in a stream through the warehouse to be distributed all over the great western country. At times there was a pile of corn a mile long on the river bank waiting to be transported by ox train to the western army posts. "Hauling coals to Newcastle" would seem to be just as sensible as importing corn into Nebraska, and one can almost fancy the fertile acres laughing at the folly of bringing corn from a great distance to the country particularly adapted to growing that cereal. But in the early days there were many vicissitudes to be considered between the planting and the harvesting of a crop in the new country.

The first locomotive to set a wheel in Nebraska was brought from St. Joseph on this packet line consigned through Mr. Deuel's house. It was the "General Sherman" of the Union Pacific. For a time Mr. Deuel preserved the bill of lading of the epoch-making engine, but it was consumed in a fire several years ago. Freight rates in those days were high. Between St. Joseph and Omaha the rate was from 45 cents to \$1 a hundred in time of high water. When the water was low and snags and sandbars consequently plentiful, the rate ran as high as \$3 a hundred pounds. On the twenty locomotives the packet line brought from St. Joseph to Omaha the freight was a round \$1,500 each.

Admiration for Steamboats Strong

Mr. Deuel spent one of his first summers as clerk on one of these boats, the "Denver." General Sherman and his staff returning from a trip to a western fort took passage on the vessel one trip going to St. Joseph. For these old pioneer vessels of the Missouri Mr. Deuel still has a strong admiration.

"The Denver was really a fine boat," he says. "In some things we were compelled to get along with makeshifts in those days, but the boats were all right. The Denver was a pretty vessel of 300 tons burden and having accommodations for 150 first class passengers. The fare between St. Joe and Omaha was \$12. The trip one way took something more than two days. In times of low water the time of passage was very uncertain on account of the snags and sand bars in the 'Old Muddy.' As a rule the trip was very pleasant. On moonlight nights we kept right on going. When it was unpleasant we tied up at night. In either event there was plenty of amusement on board and generally a dance. I used to play the guitar myself when I was needed. One night when we were on a sand bar just below Nebraska City and the river full of ice, fire broke out forward. Only two or three of us knew it and by quick work put it out before the passengers had time to fall into a panic. Had they done so they would have been lost, for we had only one small boat and the ice in the river would have made it impossible for anyone to swim ashore."

Mr. Deuel had been married January 6, 1855, to Miss Frelove Jane Miller of Tiskilwa, Ill. After he had determined to remain in Omaha he returned east and brought her and their baby girl to his new home. He purchased the west sixty-six feet of the property on which the Bee building now stands and upon it was built the rudest kind of a structure. It was made of cottonwood boards set upright and rough shingles nailed across these. Factory canvas was tacked on the inside to keep out the cold. In this house the little family lived for several years. It was a favorite camping ground for the Indians. Many a night a growling and noise of tumbling about could be heard under the floor and the pioneers knew that the braves were inviting themselves to the shelter afforded by the house. Later Mr. Deuel sold the sixty-six-foot lot for \$1,400. The first railroad ticket sold out of Omaha was sold by Mr.



HARRY PORTER DEUEL.

Deuel in 1860. Peter Groat, then general passenger agent of the Hannibal & St. Joseph railroad, had, at young Deuel's request, sent him a number of sample tickets to the leading cities of the country. Prior to that time travelers for the east simply bought a steamboat ticket to St. Joseph in Omaha and, upon arriving in St. Joseph, purchased

their railroad ticket to the east. A few days after young Deuel had received the sample tickets a miner returning from the west entered the office and asked for a ticket to St. Joseph. Right there young Deuel exhibited the enterprise which made him successful in later years. Pulling out his bunch of sample tickets, he

convinced the miner that he could book him direct to all the principal cities of the world and that the tickets which he handled were not excelled anywhere on earth. The miner was convinced and then and there the first railroad ticket was sold. It was to New York by way of steamer to St. Joseph and thence east by the Hannibal & St. Joseph, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and Pennsylvania lines. The two men who had gained distinction, the one by buying and the other by selling the first railroad ticket out of Omaha, went out and celebrated the event, tradition saith, in a glass of lemonade.

Agent for the Railroad

Having demonstrated his ability to get business, Mr. Deuel was selected as agent for the Kansas City, St. Joseph & Council Bluffs railway when that road was built through a few years later. When the B. & M. was built to Omaha he took the responsible position of agent for that road and held it until 1888, when he resigned to become city passenger agent for the Union Pacific. He resigned this position in 1896 to become superintendent of the Burlington passenger station. And he resigned this position and completed his railroad career in 1899, in which year he was elected auditor of Douglas county. In 1901 he was elected register of deeds, a position which he held until January, 1904.

Masonry has been a life-long study of Mr. Deuel. He has occupied many high positions in the order. He was the first grand high priest and the first grand commander of the Nebraska lodge. He has attained to the highest degree of Masonry, the thirty-third degree, Scottish rite, the Ancient Arabic Order, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. He is also a member of the Elks lodge. As a business man, Mr. Deuel has always occupied a high place. He has held the strenuous position of passenger agent during the many years of fierce competition between the many railroads in Omaha. He has advanced with the times and has always been in the front rank of the progressives. Many men trained in the art of getting business came out from the east, but none were able to get ahead of the pioneer.

Personality is Attractive

His success was due largely to a naturally attractive personality and a penchant for making friends. He is today the same genial man he has always been. Time has set a gentle hand upon him and he bears his seventy years with grace. One would not believe that the tall, erect man with the grey moustache and clear complexion has reached three score and ten. It has been a cheerful optimistic seventy years and that is the reason they have not worn the man. He has been in demand at meetings of pioneers and always an honored guest as "dean of the ticket agents" at meetings of men of his own profession. His mind runs along the line of the passenger agent naturally, even to the final step, as is shown by an address he made at a meeting some time ago, in which he said: "I trust when the time comes for you to take the journey we all must take, when Charon has transferred you over the dark river and you have presented yourselves to Saint Peter and handed him your tickets for admission within the gates, he will glance you over, take your ticket and, after a careful examination, will remark, 'This is all right, straight ticket, properly signed, witnessed, limited and stamped. No scalping work here. Pass right in. Usher, show these gentlemen to front seats.'"

Mr. Deuel and Mrs. Deuel occupy the home where they have lived for more than twenty years at Nineteenth and Dodge streets. Only one of their two children is living. This is Charles L. Deuel, who married Miss Mary Lake, daughter of George B. Lake. He is cashier of the McCord, Brady company. Miss Blanche L. Deuel, the baby girl the pioneer brought with them to Omaha, died at the age of 18. She was a member of the first class graduated from the Omaha high school in 1876. She was a musician of extraordinary talent and a great favorite with all who knew her.

Mr. Deuel is still as active as many men half his age and predicts the brightest things for Omaha in the future. He believes history ought to be made to repeat itself in the rehabilitation of the Missouri river with the steamboats which so befittingly rode up and down that stream in the early days.

Weidensall Tells of His Trip Through Belgium

IN MY trip to Belgium I visited two cities only, Brussels and Antwerp. Brussels, the capital of Belgium, situated about the center of the kingdom, is the seat of government and the residence of the royal family. It has a population of more than 600,000 inhabitants, quite a number of whom are English, French, German and Dutch. Brussels is a manufacturing center, chiefly noted for the manufacture of very fine and beautiful lace which bears its name. Its many celebrated boulevards and squares, its many large and splendid buildings and its many excellent public institutions make Brussels one of the most noted cities of the world. It is often very deservingly called "Little Paris." A mere mention of some of these things must suffice; the great Boulevard Waterloo and Avenue Louise, the great park fronting the king's palace, the Grand Place or Central Square of the city, remarkable because of its historical relations. "The history of this square is coincident with the history of Brussels. There was not a marked incident of the city, not a revolt, not an execution, no festival, no public rejoicing, of which the Grand Place was not the scene." The huge cathedral, with two great twin towers. "The pulpit of this cathedral is one of the most beautiful known specimens of wood carving, the monopoly of which Belgium has retained to this day." The Hotel de Ville, or city hall, one of the finest in Europe, and the Palace of Justice, one of the really wonderful structures of the world. "The new Palais de Justice of Brussels is certainly of all edifices in the world the most gigantic in bulk and the most daring in conception." Then the museum and picture galleries are of the finest order. The battlefield of Waterloo is in the environs of the city and can be seen on a clear day from the top of the Palace of Justice and from the tower of the Hotel de Ville.

Antwerp, though smaller than Brussels and not so noted in many things, is a good second to Brussels. It has many fine public and private buildings. Its chief cathedral is noted for its unspiced paintings of Rubens, the "Taking Christ Down from the Cross" and the "Putting Him on the Cross," as well as the great altar picture, "The Taking Christ Down from the Cross" is the chief masterpiece. No picture of this event in the world is so real as Rubens'. This cathedral has a very handsome wood carved pulpit like the one in Brussels. The magnificent Museum building contains the Rubens' picture gallery and a gallery of Van Dyck's paintings. These galleries contain many original paintings of these master painters. The Museum also contains a

large space devoted to sculpture, with many remarkable specimens.

Antwerp is also a great center of trade. It is said that more than three times as many ships enter and clear the harbor of Antwerp than of Amsterdam, Holland. This of itself shows the magnitude of its trade and commerce.

Belgium is a small country, but rich in its soil. It is chiefly made up of lowlands; farming and pasturing are doubtless its chief employments; however, much manufacturing is done. It is said that 120,000 persons are employed in the manufacturing of fine lace. The value of the yearly production is about 50,000,000 francs. Belgium is certainly well situated for business and travel, so near the great business centers of the world. Everybody seems busy. While there must be much wealth in the hands of some, there is much poverty. The country is almost exclusively Catholic.

I reached Brussels Saturday, November 3, 1906, and was driven at once to the hotel, where I was to lodge while in the city. I met there the United States consul of Ghent, Belgium, Major W. P. Atwell, and his wife, who were spending some days in Brussels. After supper I was called upon by Mr. V. Balty, acting secretary of the Belgian national committee of the Young Men's Christian association. I went with him to the rooms of the association, which were convenient and adapted to the work of the association. The rooms were near the great university building in Rue des Finances (Finance street), in a central but rather secluded place. The national secretary could speak no English nor understand it. Our communication on the way to the rooms was by signs and guesses and we succeeded admirably. There was a good number of persons waiting for our arrival and afforded us a very lively and hearty welcome. After looking over the building we entered the meeting specially called to greet me and hear what I had to communicate to them. There was a good number of representative association men present, with hearty expressions of welcome, though in a foreign tongue; these expressions, however, needed no interpreter; they were plainly written on their faces and manifest in all their movements. Such expressions are the same in all languages, easily understood. They were also very eager to learn what I had to communicate on association work. I presented to them many letters of greeting I had with me from many nations of the world. These greetings were heartily received. I then spoke to them of the association work, strongly emphasizing its tremendous importance, its marvelous adaptability to the work it had to do and its un-

paralleled success. I also answered a number of questions asked me.

In view of the many difficulties in the way of the association work, I encouraged them to persevere. In the United States we have no idea of the bitter oppositions to the Young Men's Christian association work by the Catholic church. The association in Brussels is doing a good work, could do a better and, in the usual rapid growth of association work wherever it has a reasonable chance, they would soon be in a satisfactory condition to benefit the young men of Brussels.

The next day, Sunday, was a very unpleasant day. I was not in condition to do much, so I stayed indoors all day, about the first day in my world trip that I spent indoors. I profited very much by it.

Monday, November 5, I spent most of the day seeing what I could of this marvellously beautiful city. I visited Brussels in 1894 and compassed it very thoroughly. I could see much better than that now.

In the evening I attended another representative meeting of the Young Men's Christian association. I had a long and most profitable conference with them. Besides these large meetings I had some most satisfactory interviews with individuals on the association work and how they could serve in it. I longed for more time to help them, but I had to go.

On Tuesday, November 6, I took the train for Antwerp and soon arrived at that most interesting city and was housed in a private hotel—quite comfortable. I had acquainted the association folks of Antwerp that they would have two days of my time at their disposal if they needed it. Previous appointments of the association had provided for all the time I promised them, so the most I hoped to do was to see what I could in Antwerp and possibly have some personal interviews with association men. They wanted me very badly, only they could not use me during the time I would be there.

Wednesday, December 7, I visited the association rooms and had personal interviews with the young man acting as general secretary, who went with me to see the president of the association, Mr. J. Pijl, who was overwhelmed with all the details of a lecture and entertainment for the association and could give me no time then, but invited me most hospitably to spend the night at his house. Unable to do anything for the association, I put in much of the day sight-seeing. I visited a number of remarkable places. The cathedral, with Rubens' masterpiece in it, the great Museum containing the Rubens' and Van Dyck's picture galleries, visited some more of the

splendid buildings, passed through a number of the splendid streets and boulevards and several of its magnificent parks. Toward the close of the day I was called upon by President Pijl of the association, who told me his meeting for the evening had to be given up, as the party who was to be the chief actor in it was sick and could not perform his part. It was a crushing blow to the president's hopes, as the association could not afford such a disappointment. He wanted me to go to the hall prepared to make an address to the association folks if he could arrange for it, thereby making the best of the great disappointment and affording the association folks desirable information on association effort. But no meeting of the kind could be arranged for. I then went with him to his home and met his most charming family, one of the finest I have met anywhere. I showed them some of my letters of greeting from different nations. Later in the evening I had a most delightful interview with Mr. Pijl on Christian association work. As he was president of the association and as I would have no other opportunity to meet others of the association, I tried to do all I could to help him by every possible suggestion and encouragement. He received all I had to say in a very appreciative manner. We talked until very late at night. Mr. Pijl is a man of God, one of the best men I have yet met, and with a family like him. As I looked at him, so concerned for the success of the association work in Antwerp and Belgium, and so anxious for more association workers, I said within myself, "O, for more men like Mr. J. Pijl with such a true life and purpose, standing as a Christian business man for the association and its work of serving young men." While I could do no formal work for the Antwerp association, I value most highly the personal interviews I had with President Pijl and regretted most sincerely that I could not remain, as he wanted me to do when he could arrange a satisfactory meeting for me.

Belgium has a most difficult work for its association. It has a national committee and hopes to employ an efficient national secretary to devote all his time to the development of true association work throughout the kingdom. A very good man is available when the means are provided, Mr. V. Balty of Brussels. My stay in Belgium, with all the drawbacks, was most enjoyable. I had an intense desire to remain longer to afford help and encouragement to the association workers, but I had to pass on to my appointments in Holland.

London, England, January 10, 1906.

ROBERT WEIDENSALL.